

S. Alan Skinner

Scouting for Archeology



Indian lore is interwoven through many of the programs and activities of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA). Interest in Native American culture was one of the basic tenets of the BSA founders, and remains an important facet of the Scouting program as reflected in traditional dancing, outdoor programs, and the Order of the Arrow, a national camping honorary society that was founded around Native American (specifically, Lenni-Lenape tribe) lifeways and ceremonies.¹ In looking at local council or troop programs throughout the United States, it is apparent that Native American archeology is a part of the Scouting program, even though archeology is not a conservation topic at the national level, nor is there an archeology merit badge. The purpose of this article is to explore the history of archeology in Scouting, what is happening today, and what the future holds for Scouting in archeology and for archeology in Scouting. It is my belief that with a vision, a plan, and support archeology can become an important conservation issue within the BSA. In this way, it will be possible for Scouting to make a significant impact upon the preservation of historic resources in America and throughout the world.

Primarily because of a widespread interest in archeology and the availability of recognizable prehistoric archeological ruins at the Philmont Scout Ranch in northeastern New Mexico, hands-

on archeological education in the BSA began at the national level in 1941. At that time, Sam Bogan and a group of scouts partially excavated a dry rockshelter known as Box Canyon Cave in the North Ponil Canyon at Philmont.

In 1956, Eugene Lutes started a regular summer program in archeology at Philmont with excavation of the Pueblo II age Slab House site at a camp known as Indian Writings. The isolated location, the presence of pueblo-style pithouses, rockshelters with dry deposits, petroglyphs, prehistoric pottery painted with black on white designs, and the proximity to Taos and other Rio Grande pueblos, all lent an aura of excitement to the program.² Thousands of Scouts and Scout leaders have experienced archeology at Indian Writings since the program's inception. The program has shifted over the years from one of digging the seemingly inexhaustible ruins, to today's perspective in which conservation and the need to preserve irreplaceable archeological resources have become important guiding factors. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, archeology was so popular at Philmont that the "Ponil Men" program was established by Mike Glassow, who now teaches archeology at the University of California at Santa Barbara. Scouts came for a 12-day program of archeology. Although this would have been a logical time for the development of national awareness, it did not happen. Not only would it have been a logical development from the standpoint of nationwide conservation concerns, it was also at this same point that conservation archeology began to take off in the United States, and there was a significant increase in the number of archeologists and archeological projects throughout the country. While a less intensive program at Philmont continues today, an opportunity was missed to incorporate archeology into the National Scouting program and provide a formal mechanism to reinforce the cultural resource conservation experience at Philmont.

Throughout the '50s and '60s, there was a general attitude on the part of professional archeologists that we could not trust the general public with information about archeological sites and

Excavation at a rock foundation site at the Boy Scouts of America's Indian Writings Camp, Philmont. Photo courtesy of Steve Zimmer, Philmont Museum, and Seton Memorial Library.



finds. Thus, this was a time when it would have been difficult, or impossible, to have rallied support for archeology in Scouting, because Scouts, along with the public in general, were viewed primarily as potential looters or pothunters who had little respect for the remains of the past.

As early as 1966, Jim Word, an active Scouter and an involved avocational archeologist from the Texas Panhandle, approached the National Council with a plan for a merit badge in archeology. He was told that there was no national interest in archeology, but that he could develop a local program. He did so and an archeological program was established in the South Plains Council, BSA in Lubbock, Texas. However,

the program was primarily guided and stimulated by Mr. Word, and as his life changed, he did not have the time needed to devote to the local program, and it was discontinued. Starting in 1967 and continuing until 1973, another Scouter from near Philadelphia sought to have a merit badge developed, but he, too, was told that there was no interest in the subject.

In the 1980s, several professional archeologists had approached their local councils and the BSA National Council about developing an archeology merit badge. Each believed that Scouting and archeology were a good match if put together through the merit badge program. Their involvement in Scouting had occurred because they were volunteer leaders. They were also unaware that archeology had previously been rejected by the National Council. As before, these Scouters were told that there was no nationwide interest in archeology but that if they wished, they could develop a local program.

At the same time, major changes had occurred in archeology throughout the United States. First, nearly every land-controlling federal and state agency had hired archeologists and had become aware of the general public's interest in historic and prehistoric archeology.³ Many of these agencies, particularly the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Corps of Engineers, and National Park Service, had developed programs to incorporate volunteers into field programs.⁴ In each of these cases, there was overriding support from the agency that was put into play with local initiative. Moreover, archeology awareness week programs developed by state historical preservation offices and amateur archeological groups had intensified public outreach. In addition, more of

the general public had leisure time for avocational activities, and for many that meant the development of increased public interest in archeology, increased tourism to national and state parks, and the development of educational programs such as Crow Canyon in Colorado and Campsville in Illinois.⁵ There also was increased emphasis on the preservation of archeological sites through such organizations as the Archaeological Conservancy.

In an attempt to bridge the national gap, Bonnie McKee of Dallas, Texas, developed a statewide archeology program for Scouting. The program, known as the Texas Archeology Preservation Award, is administered through the Texas Archeological Society with the support of the State Archeologist and the Texas Historical Commission. The program is generally completed by a group of Scouts from a troop that has a leader with an interest in archeology. Only rarely is it done by an individual Scout. As an optional patch program, it competes with other national and regional programs, and has not been effectively marketed to all councils throughout the state.

Through my involvement in the development of the Texas Archeology Preservation Award program, I came to realize that our local initiative and grass roots support was important, but that if archeology was going to be embraced by Scouting at the national level, it had to be from the top down. It came as a surprise that a merit badge had been rejected so many times in the past, and that Merianne Nelson of American Fork, Utah, and the Mid-Atlantic Regional office of the National Park Service had recently submitted proposals and had each been rejected. It was also interesting to learn that archeology merit badges were offered in Scouting both in Europe and in Africa.

With the previous proposals and rejection letters in hand, a set of preliminary merit badge requirements were developed and sent out for review to several amateur archeologists, Scouters, and professional archeologists. These requirements were then modified so that the badge could be earned by Scouts in both rural and urban settings. The requirements were designed so that they would essentially cover the subject of archeology while at the same time be achievable and stimulating enough so that a Scout would want to pursue the badge.

Finally, in February 1992, a complete proposal was submitted to the BSA National Council office. The proposal addressed the concerns expressed in responses to previous proposals. The proposal included more than 400 letters of support from Scouts, Scouters, amateur and professional archeologists, and museum personnel from throughout the country. As before, the initial response from the BSA National Council was not



The Texas Archeology Preservation Award Boy Scout patch. Photo by Jim Whorton, Troop 70, Dallas.

positive, but staffing changes, as well as a second push,⁶ led to further discussion and ultimately to the BSA National Council's evaluation of possible new merit badge topics. Out of more than 240 topics, archeology came in with a rank of 20th, and the subject is clearly being given further evaluation by the Boy Scouts.

Archeology continues to be a part of Scouting. We can expect that it will as long as it is practiced at Philmont and as long as the public has the time to express their interest in archeology by participating in such training programs as the U.S. Forest Service's *Passport in Time*, the Bureau of Land Management's *Adventures in the Past* and *Heritage Education* programs, as well as in educational programs such as at Crow Canyon and in public school curricula.⁷

This experience in the awakening of cultural resources management, or conservation archeology, by the Boy Scouts of America has served to highlight several areas of concern. The foremost is that it is apparent that the conservation of irreplaceable cultural resources had not been adequately understood by the national staff and their advisors even though they were supporting an important archeological program at Philmont. Furthermore, they were also implicitly supporting the involvement of many Scouts in archeological activities, including Eagle service projects, archeological excavations, and Explorer posts (BSA young adult program) specializing in archeology. This lack of overall comprehension is probably best emphasized when one considers the small number of publications produced in relation to the mass of information and artifacts generated by the over 35 years of the summer program at Philmont. Most of this material remains unstudied and in need of improved curation. Archeologists have a continuing responsibility to emphasize the need for the preservation and conservation of cultural resources to all organizations that participate in archeological investigations.

The other insight learned is that in an organization such as the Boy Scouts of America, it is necessary for the leadership to embrace the concept of archeology as a concern in the conservation and historical sense if the resources are going to receive the attention they deserve. This is not to downplay the importance of local grass roots support, but if archeology is to be accepted in large organizations such as the BSA, it is essential that it is adopted as a focus area from the top down. At the local level, archeology might be the focus of an individual, but the locally-stimulated interest and concern must be spread more widely in order to ensure consistent treatment of irreplaceable archeological resources by members of an entire organization. This fact is particularly important, when it

is realized that archeology consumes the history that it seeks to understand.

Notes

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- 2 Lutes, Eugene, 1959, "A Marginal Prehistoric Culture of Northeastern New Mexico." *El Palacio* 66(2):59-68.
- 3 Lipe, William D. 1974. "A Conservation Model for American Archaeology." *Kiva* 39:213-45. Society for American Archaeology, 1990, *Save the Past for the Future, Actions for the '90s*, Final Report Taos Working Conference on Preventing Archaeological Looting and Vandalism.
- 4 Davis, Hester P. 1990, *Training and Using Volunteers in Archeology: A Case Study from Arkansas*. National Park Service, Archeological Assistance Program, Technical Brief No. 9: Knoll, Patricia C. 1990, *Listing of Education in Archeological Programs, The Leap Clearing House, 1987-1989 Summary Report*. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Archeological Assistance Division.
- 5 Struever, Stuart and Felicia Antonelli Holton, 1979, *Koster, Americans in Search of their Prehistoric Past*. Anchor Press/Doubleday, Garden City, NY; Thompson, Ian M. 1989, Forward. In *The Architecture of Social Integration in Prehistoric Pueblos*, edited by W.D. Lipe and M. Hegmon, Occasional Papers of the Crow Canyon Archaeological Center, No. 1, pp. xi.
- 6 Skinner, S. Alan, 1993, "Indiana Jones Was a Boy Scout Without a Merit Badge." *Newsletter of the Society of Professional Archeologists*, 17(6):6-8.
- 7 Smith, KC and Francis P. McManamon, eds., 1991, *Archeology and Education: The Classroom and Beyond*. National Park Service, Archeological Assistance Study. No. 2: Smith, Shelley T., Jeanne M. Moe, Kelly A. Letts, and Danielle M. Paterson, 1990, *Intrigue of the Past, A Teacher's Activity Guide for Fourth through Sixth Grades*. United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management: Wheat, Pam and Brenda Whorton, eds., 1990, *Clues from the Past, A Resource Book on Archeology*. A Publication in Cooperation with the Texas Archeological Society. Hendrick-Long Publishing Co., Dallas, TX.

S. Alan Skinner, PhD., is the principal in charge of AR Consultants, a cultural resources management company in Dallas, Texas.

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